

Goodwin, Wesley: Knitting And Hanging Net ^[1]

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Wesley Goodwin: Knitting And Hanging Net

by David Cecelski. "[Listening to History](#) ^[2]," *News & Observer*. Published 8/12/2001. Copyrighted. Reprinted with permission.

On a hot summer morning I found 86-year-old Wesley Goodwin standing amid corks and twine in his backyard net shop. Born and raised on Cedar Island, he has long lived nearby in the fishing village of Atlantic, in the Downeast section of Carteret County. Many local fishermen still rely on Goodwin to "hang net" -- attach lines, corks and weights to factory-made, polyethylene webbing -- but he is also one of the rare watermen who know the dying art of making fishing nets by hand.

In Wesley Goodwin's words:



Wesley Goodwin. Photo by Chris Seward, 2001. To request permission for further use or to purchase a print, please contact the *News & Observer*.

I was born in 1915. My daddy was fishing pound nets about a mile off Cedar Island beach at that time. They had their nets set, but they had to get up at 3 o'clock to go to them before day. Didn't, then what we call cormorants -- I don't know if I was 6, 7 years old, I reckon. I'd say, "Dad, call me in the morning. I want to go with you." I'd go with him just about every morning if it weren't raining or blowing. That wasn't unusual for boys on Cedar Island, because all the young boys went. When they take one of the nets up, you have to mend the holes in it. Sharks and them big red drum go through them. Sometimes the turtles would eat holes in them. Bluefish eat the bunt net up. I'd go on the marsh with my daddy, help him. In '46 or '47 they took a cancer out my intestine here bigger than a grapefruit. Doctor told me, he said, "Goodwin, you've done your last day's work." I come home, lay around a month or two. I was going crazy. I told my wife, there's got to be a way. I'm going to show you how to make one. This here is the old-timey way. This is the way we had to get our nets. You didn't go to the store to get your net all ready to hang. You had to do this. This is what you call "knitting net." This is knitting. I'll take that off, start right again. This here spaces it. That's what's called a "knit gauge." You can have it any size you want it. I guess that's about what you call inch and 1/4 net. Just an overhand knot. You got to catch it just like that. While you were off fishing, your wife was doing this, see? My wife could do it just as good as I could, probably a little better. I just picked it up. Sometimes, you know, nights, I would help her. She'd want to rest a little, I'd go ahead and take it. That's what we call a spot net. Catch him in the fall of the year -- that would be inch and a half for spots. Now mullet net, in the spring you had inch and a quarter, and right on up in the fall you had two-inch get the roe mullet. You'd want them. Them days, you had to put lime on a net every time you used it. Lime it, then dry it. It would rot overnight, cotton would, if you didn't take care of it. Put the lime right down in the bottom of your skiff and take your skiff bailer and mix it up with water. Pound nets, you put tar on. They stay in the water. In wintertime you tarred it when you first started the season, didn't tar it anymore till the next season. You had to put it in a big vat, then you had to make a fire underneath of that and heat the water. You couldn't buy no corks then. You had to make your own. Late in the fall, when it started to get cool, you'd go back into the swamp and take you an ax, dig around the root of a gum tree. Got to get underneath there and dig the root out. Got to get it. It don't take long to run the weights and corks on the line. You can do that in little or no time. But hanging it, that's what takes time. See, your marshes -- that's what we call them anyway -- they've got to be the same distance apart if you get it right. In my day everybody made their own net 'cause didn't have money enough to hire somebody to do it. When I was coming up, if you made \$5 or \$6 a week, or even \$4, that was talked about! That's right. And you were glad to get that \$5 or \$6

David Cecelski is the Lehman Brady professor at Duke University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

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